

Goethals Indian Library and Research Society, Kolkata: an explorative study

Arnab Mahajan^{1*} and Pubalika Bhattacharya Maitra²

¹Library, Kolkata Police Law Institute, West Bengal, India

²Assistant Professor, Dept. of Library & Information Science, University of Calcutta, West Bengal, India

*Corresponding Author. Email: mahajanarnab1987@gmail.com

Received on: August 12, 2024 | Accepted on: September 21, 2024 | Published on: September 29, 2024

Abstract

Goethals Indian Library and Research Society (GILRS) is an athenaeum of mainly 18th and 19th century books and periodicals. It was started by Paul Goethals, Jesuit Archbishop of Calcutta (1886-1901) and it was later donated to St. Xavier's College in 1908. The library currently contains more than thirty thousand volumes of books on a wide range of topics, such as voyages and travels, history, biographies, folklore, astronomy, flora and fauna, geology, language and literature, archaeology, education, religion, philosophy, law, medicine, government and administration in India and other Asian countries. A special feature of the Goethals Library at St. Xavier's College is the rarity of the collection and the diversity of the languages found. The library has preserved rare documents and archived documents for the research need of scholars. This historical library is carrying the essence of the past to disseminate the knowledge to everyone interested.

This paper tried to explore the services, general collections, rare and valuable collections, functions of Goethals Indian Library and Research Society, Kolkata. The study also revealed that how far the library was acquainted with to deal the present day library scenario. It was found that the library had a rich collection with restricted access. Though the collection had been developed mainly with the donated books but those were historical assets and this is why special preservation procedure was followed. Dedicated and special services had been provided by the staff members to the users, especially to research scholars.

Keywords: Goethals Indian Library and Research Society, St. Xavier's, Special Library, Historical Library, Paul Goethals, GILRS.

Introduction:

At St. Xavier's in Kolkata, there is a priceless relic that was given to the Jesuit Fathers in 1908 by Paul Goethals, S.J., who was the Archbishop of Calcutta at the time. According to a catalog made by Archbishop Goethals in 1898, the collector's interests are wide-ranging and include Ancient India, the Portuguese in India, the Dutch, the French, the Muhamedan period, the British period, gazetteers, the States, the Tribes, archaeology, the arts, religions, philosophy, Indology, natural history, travel, and more. According to experts, the

section on travels and travelers is unique since it dates back to the 17th century and is available in multiple languages. Six large volumes of Oriental Scenery, each with 24 views and color engravings by Thomas and William Daniell, spanning the period from March 1, 1795 to June 1, 1803, are other remarkable treasures. Along with the intricate dagger collection, there are several curios and marble Buddha statues (Raj, 2017).

The Goethals library in Bengal houses a vast collection of hard bound Eastern periodicals dating back to their founding days. The library has been

modernized, cataloguing books, periodicals, and plates, and has been designated as a Research and Reference Centre. It houses manuscripts of Bengal Mission historian Fr. H. Hosten, Fr. W. Wallace, and Brahmabandhav Upadhyay. The library has 1,000 titles published before 1799, a significant increase from the National Library's 1,700. The library also hosts exhibitions, seminars, and symposiums, and assists researchers in obtaining research materials online. The library aims to continue the rich tradition of scholarly Jesuits like Frs. Johanns and Dandoy, Courtois, Lievens, P. Fallon, and Robert Antoine. The library is dedicated to disseminating knowledge and providing information for researchers and students. The present Director and Secretary of this historical library is Rev. Fr. Jeyaraj Veluswamy, S.J. Rector of St. Xavier's College.

Literature review:

There was no such work had been done related to the Goethals Indian Library and Research Society till date. But there were some articles written by the authorities of the library on various platforms.

Raj (2017) opined that the Library wanted to carry on the illustrious and abundant legacy of learned Jesuits such as Frs. Johanns and Dandoy (Hinduism), Courtois (Islam), Lievens (Tribal Rights), P. Fallon, and Robert Antoine (Indology). We encourage scholars and research students to use the library. Our aim is to assist and motivate them in their academic pursuits.

Mitra & Biswas (2022) in their article on "An Analytical Study on Digitisation of Archival Materials and its Aftereffects with Special Reference to Kolkata Archives" found that the Achieves of Goethals Indian Library and Research Society had a no. of 19900 records of the period of 1570AD onwards which comprise of Books, Periodicals, Plates. But the conditions of the records were very old and brittle.

Objective of the Study:

- To explore the library services provided by Goethals Indian Library and Research Society;
- To explore the general and special collections of Goethals Indian Library and Research Society;
- To know how the library is able to serve to researchers and ensure proper usage of resources;

Method adopted in this study:

Here in this study a case study was handled by the author. An interview session was done with the library staff members to take the opportunity to get the historical information as well as the current state of affair and the mode of operation of library services. The study covered the Goethals Indian Library and Research Society as a case study.

History of Goethals Indian Library and Research Society:

Goethals Indian Library and study Society is a rich trove of antiquated papers, although it is largely unknown to those with a great interest in historical study. It is located in Kolkata's Park Street St. Xavier's College building, above the main Chapel.

Very few people are aware that a treasure practically unknown to our people's aspirants in historical study is housed in a portion of the St. Xavier's College building on Park Street, adjacent to the College building itself, above the major Chapel.

The first Archbishop of Calcutta, Paul-François-Marie Goethals, was born in Kortrijk, Belgium, on November 11, 1832. Goethals served as the Rector of the second College Saint-Michel, a Jesuit high school in Brussels, from 1868 to 1869. He then became the Provincial Superior of the Belgian Jesuits from 1870 to 1876. He was chosen to serve as the Apostolic Vicar (an archbishop, bishop, or other ecclesiastic to whom the pope transferred a

portion of his jurisdiction) of Calcutta because of his leadership qualities and proficiency in English.

The Bengal Mission started to trust the Belgian Jesuits at that point. Archbishop Goethals established the first Catholic printing press in Calcutta. Additionally, he amassed a library of about 6000 books on India's religions, geography, travels, culture, and languages. The collection evolved into the focal point of the current Goethals Indian Library and Research Society, which is affiliated with St. Xavier's College in Calcutta. Along with his academic activity, the Archbishop also maintained knowledge of the city's cultural and social life. The Asiatic Society of Bengal chose him to serve as its president. A group of academics known as the Asiatic Society works to advance understanding and appreciation of the numerous Indian languages and dynamic civilizations. On June 4th, 1901, he passed away in this city. The collection of the riches was inherited. It was anticipated that the collection, which was given to the Jesuit Fathers, would be preserved as a separate research library.



Photo 1 Paul Goethals, S.J. #

Collection of the Libraries:

The quality of collected documents was justified to be protected as a special Library. From the Archbishop's lifetime a rare document is the catalogue published by him in 1898. In 160 foolscap length pages plus a three page addenda, the listed titles and authors means the taste of owner's interest and his keen sense of collection. No doubt it is scientific to a great extent.

Ancient India;

- the Portuguese in India;
- the Dutch in India;
- the French in India;
- the Muhamedddan period;
- the British period;
- Gazetteers;
- the States;
- the Tribes;
- Archaeology;
- the Arts;
- Religions;
- Philosophy;
- Ideology;
- Natural History;
- Travels
- There are also a number of curios, marble Buddha statues and an exquisite dagger collection etc.



Photo 2 Archbishops of Calcutta#

Mahajan, Arnab and Pubalika Bhattacharya Maitra. "Goethals Indian Library and Research Society, Kolkata: an explorative study" *Brainwave: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, vol. 5, no. 3, Sept. 2024, pp. 809–815.

The section of travels and travelers from the 17th century having different languages which has been described by specialists as unique. Another significant treasure is the six large volumes of oriental scenery each one containing 24 views, colour engravings by Thomas and William Daniell, from March 1, 1795, to June 1, 1803.

Collection of outside India:

A catalogue of 1931, illustrate an interest extended to India's Asian neighbors: Tibet, Mongolia, South Asia, China, Japan, and East Asia down to the Malay. Archipelago and the Philippine Islands, Central Asia, Persia, and Egypt.

Other collections:

The Sanskrit section has a separate catalogue, and significant accumulations are Economics, Education, the Census, Government, and Administration. The library contains a collection of 17,663 volumes of books and periodicals.

Rare collection:

Among exceptional assets of the present library is a rich collection of hard bound Eastern periodicals reaching back to their beginning days. The list consists

- Bengal Past and Present (commencing July 1907),
- the Calcutta Review (158 volumes);
- Modern Review (1907-1978);
- Light of the East (complete series, October 1922 - December 1946);
- Journal of the Asiatic society of Bengal (from Volume 1, 1832).
- In the case of some newspapers and periodicals the series in this library are more absolute than in the publications' offices.



Photo 3 Rare Collections[#]



Photo 4 Ancient & Palm leaf Manuscript[#]

Mahajan, Arnab and Pubalika Bhattacharya Maitra. "Goethals Indian Library and Research Society, Kolkata: an explorative study" *Brainwave: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, vol. 5, no. 3, Sept. 2024, pp. 809–815.

Collection of manuscripts:

About 50 manuscripts of the Bengal Mission historian, Fr. H. Hosten, are stored. Beside this a few of Fr. W. Wallace also stored. And the ground breaking educationist, Brahmabandhav Upadhyay collection is being preserved here. A former Deputy Librarian of the National Library, Calcutta, Mr. Avinash Lal, has listed in this collection the titles published before 1799. The total of 1,000, an extraordinary number when a collection of the size and status of the National Library is about 1,700.



Photo 5 Bramhabandhab Upadhyay Collection[#]



Photo 3 Indian Bengali theologian, journalist and freedom fighter Sri Bramhabandhab Upadhyay.[#]



Photo 6 Photo of old Goethals Buildings[#]



Photo 7 Book Preservation[#]

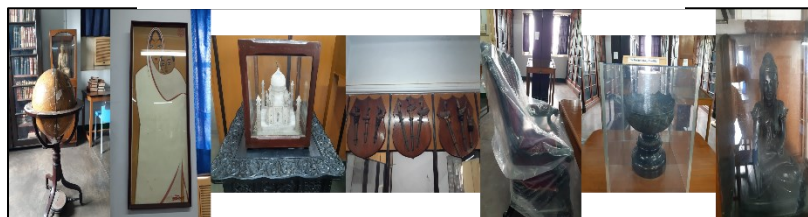


Photo 8 Curio collections[#]

Preservation and archiving:

The authority is required to go through the laminating process for such vast, unique collections since the documents are too ancient. After the entire lamination procedure is finished, the authority will consider whether or not the digitalization process will be able to better serve the researchers as the majority of the documents are too dangerous to handle for research purposes. In addition to these, this library has other non-book materials that have been carefully archived.

Present scenario of the Library:

There is a spacious, well-ventilated and well-lit study and research section. An oval table at the centre is kept for persons doing common research work. The Library authority has completely modernized the library organization. The Goethals authority has made this treasure now accessible without complexity to research scholars, who are most admirable of its legacy.

To serve the users, the Goethals library has introduced new things in its facilities: A scientific cataloguing of the books, periodicals and plates has been done properly. Computerization process is going on. It has now been nominated as a Research and Reference Centre.

A Directory has been brought out to present a summary of the library to its users. The Directory is available in the web-site. A list of some nominated books, plates, periodicals and documents in the collection of the library is supplied for the benefit of researchers and the serious users.

The Library authority is interested to continue the great and rich custom of scholarly Jesuits like Frs. Johannes and Dandoy (Hinduism), Courtois (Islam), Lievens (Tribal rights), P. Fallon and Robert Antoine (Indology). The library welcomes research students and scholars to consume knowledge from the library. The Goethals Indian

Library and Research Society is at their service to encourage and support their scholarly work.

Library staff:

At present there are two library staffs in the library. A library in charge and a library assistant are engaged to fulfill total library management. The library staffs are recruited by St. Xavier's College authority.

Membership:

To make entry in this research library for research purpose one has to submit prayer to the Director of the library. After getting approval there is provision of membership in library. There is a fee structure of membership as follows:

Sl. No.	Membership	Fees(Rs.)
1.	Monthly	300/-
2.	Quarterly	500/-
3.	Half-yearly	1000/-
4.	Yearly	1500/-

Table 1 Membership charges

Conclusion:

Total collection of the library is more than 30,000 at present. And the collection is mainly based on donated books of Jesuit Fathers, old books which have the research oriented elements of St Xavier's college library. At present Goethals Indian Library and Research Society authority has restricted the access due to some issues. As the documents are too old they are being damaged by mishandling. All the rare collections are the asset in history of missionaries in India as a result of that it is necessary to use these documents only for special research purpose only. Beside this there are some preservation processes also going on to increase the longevity of such rare documents.

Mahajan, Arnab and Pubalika Bhattacharya Maitra. "Goethals Indian Library and Research Society, Kolkata: an explorative study" *Brainwave: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, vol. 5, no. 3, Sept. 2024, pp. 809–815.

References

Braindrops. (n.d.). Goethals Indian Library and Research Society. Retrieved June 14, 2022, from <http://www.goethals.in/>

Brown, W. (2010). A Simple Guide to ECommerce. Lulu. com.

Gabriele, A. (2018). The Grand Tour and the North-South Axis of the Nineteenth Century Book Trade: The Pan-European Trade of Foreign-Language Editions and the Forces of Incorporation that Reshaped the Industry 1. *Mémoires du livre*, 10(1).

Joseph, Pushpa. "Can Catholic Religious Women Democratize the Indian Church?." *Democratization of Indian Christianity*. Routledge India 106-125.

Mitra, S., & Biswas, A. (2022). An Analytical Study on Digitisation of Archival Materials and its Aftereffects with Special Reference to Kolkata Archives. *College Libraries*, 37(IV), 34-44.

National Archives of India. (n.d.). Retrieved June 15, 2022, from <http://nationalarchives.nic.in/>

News. National Library. (n.d.). Retrieved June 17, 2022, from <https://www.nationallibrary.gov.in/>

Raj, J. Felix. "Consecrated Life, A Sign of the Church's Vitality." *Goethals News: The Goethals Indian Library and Research Society* (2019): 1-2.

Raj, J. F. (2017, December). The Goethals Indian Library and Research Society (GILRS). St. Xavier's University Kolkata. Retrieved June 15, 2024, from <https://www.sxuk.edu.in/file/GoethalsNews/2>

017/GoethalsNews-October-December-2017.pdf

St. Xavier's college. St. Xavier's College. (n.d.). Retrieved June 10, 2022, from <https://www.sxccal.edu/>

Wikimedia Foundation. (2021, May 26). Paul Goethals. Wikipedia. Retrieved June 13, 2022, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Goethals

Photographs: Goethals Indian Library and Research Society, Kolkata

Acknowledgement:

To complete this paper properly writing I am specially thankful to Sri Biswajit Malakar (Assistant Commissioner of Police, Kolkata Police) and Sri Amit Kr. Chatterjee (Additional OC, Park street Police Station, Kolkata Police). My heartiest regard to REV. FR. JEYARAJ VELUSWAMY, S.J (Director and Secretary of The Goethals Indian Library and Research Society). I am thankful to Sri Abhijan Mondal (Library-In- Charge, The Goethals Indian Library and Research Society) and to Sri Ranajit Naskar (Library Assistant, The Goethals Indian Library and Research Society).

Contributors

Arnab Mahajan

Assistant Librarian, Kolkata Police Law Institute.
E mail: mahajanarnab1987@gmail.com

Dr. Pubalika Bhattacharya Maitra

Assistant Professor, Dept. of Library & Information Science, University of Calcutta, West Bengal, India. Email: pbmcul2@gmail.com,.